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ABSTRACT

A survey sent to 13 outdoor adventure programs asked that field staff rate their competence with regard to 10 skills commonly needed by adventure program staff. Five skills were in the technical category (backpacking, rock climbing, emergency care, canoeing, and knowledge of minimum impact camping techniques); three skills were from the interpersonal communication category (knowledge of creative problem solving, knowledge of evaluation and debriefing, and outdoor teaching techniques); and two skills were from the area of philosophical understanding (knowledge of experiential education philosophy and knowledge of leadership responsibilities). Of the 130 surveys mailed, 74 surveys were returned for a response rate of 57%. There were 22 female and 52 male respondents. On the 9-point rating scale, the mean skill level of female respondents ranged from 4.36 for rock climbing to 7.00 for outdoor teaching. The mean skill levels for male respondents ranged from 4.98 for canoeing to 6.85 for backpacking. Of the 10 skills examined there were significant differences between males and females for only backpacking and rock climbing, where males rated themselves higher than did females. This study should help demonstrate that highly competent leaders should be hired without regard to sex. (JHZ)

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Is it Really a Man's World?

Male and Female

Outdoor Adventure Leaders

Rate Their Competency

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INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1960's participation in outdoor adventure acitvities has grown considerably (Schreyer, White & McCool, 1978). Yet, many people may assume that few, if any, of the individuals participating in outdoor activities are women. However, this assumption appears to be false. In their discussion regarding women in the outdoors, Yerkes & Miranda (1985) state, "We had been told a number of times by university officials and camp administrators that they didn't offer "women's" programs because there was "no need". Yet we knew of many outdoor groups, with intriguing names like Inward Bound, Artemis, Woodswoman, and Mariah, that were obviously thriving."

In addition to participating in outdoor activities, women are also working as outdoor adventure leaders. Both the National Outdoor Leadership School and Outward Bound, two of the more widely known outdoor programs in existence today, employ women as well as men leaders. Moreover, Yerkes and Miranda (1985) identify 24 outdoor programs for women, each of which employs female leaders.

The recent surge in the popularity of outdoor adventure activities among women as well as men may be a result of many factors. Meier (1978) suggests an increase in the number of outdoor adventure programs being offered, improved technical equipment, and a betterment of safety standards as possible

causes. Another reason for a rise in the number of outdoor adventure participants may be the appeal of the stress challenge method of learning. The stress challenge method involves placing people in a physically and/or psychologically demanding and stressful environment to facilitate a building of trust, self-confidence, and acceptance of personal responsibility (Drurian, Owens, & Owen, 1988). The appeal of this approach is evidenced by the great number of participants in Outward Bound Schools and similar programs who testify that by confronting a physically and emotionally stressful challenge they feel more secure in their identity and more confident in themselves (Miles, 1978).

An assumption exists that the quality of leaders employed by an outdoor adventure program will determine the quality of the program itself. Buell (1981) states that, "Leadership is the single most critical aspect of conducting Outdoor Adventure Programs." By the same token, Metcalfe (1976) in his discussion of outdoor adventure programming states, "The quality of the small-group instructors can make or break a program. Their selection, training, and care are worth careful consideration."

Although many outdoor program professionals will agree that there is a need for highly skilled outdoor leaders, it is evident that there exists little agreement as to what skills constitute the minimum accepted competencies for

employment as an outdoor adventure leader. There have been a scattering of attempts to determine minimum outdoor leadership skill competencies. Cousineau (1977) surveyed 97 outdoor adventure professionals using a three-round modified Delphi Questionnaire to assess 47 standards for outdoor adventure leadership certification. Among the conclusions he reported was a desire by all the respondents for an outdoor leadership certification system. The respondents also felt that in order to become certified, an individual should have to meet a minimum standard of competency in each skill area.

Buell (1981) surveyed 300 outdoor adventure professionals in order to define the skill competencies which should be possessed by "entry-level" and "experienced-level" leaders. The results showed eight skills deemed essential for entry-level leaders and 60 skills essential for experienced-level leaders.

Cosgrove (1984) surveyed a panel of eight professionals representing the field of outdoor adventure programming regarding their views as to which skills an outdoor leader should possess. Cosgrove's study resulted in a list of 43 technical skills, 11 human relations skills, and 8 philosophical understanding skills. Out of the 62 skills which Cosgrove lists 37 were designated as essential for an outdoor adventure leader to possess.

In addition to the desire by outdoor program administrators to employ skilled outdoor leaders, legal

liability mandates that outdoor adventure leaders be highly skilled. Gormely (1979) states that, "Safety is the most important concern for group leaders. It is the one aspect of a group backpacking trip for which the leader may be held legally responsible." Moreover, Frakt (1978) states that, "One would search long and unsuccessfull for any instances in which injuries arising out of properly organized adventure programs have resulted in liability on the part of the program or its leaders, instructors, or supervisors." He goes on to say that, "There are sound legal reasons why adventure programming is less likely than other organized leisure activities to result in program liability provided always that it is organized and supervised by competent recreation professionals."

Outdoor leaders must also possess a diversity of interpersonal skills in addition to a variety of technical outdoor skills. Interpersonal skills include among others, communication skills, teaching skills, and group dynamic skills. In his study, Cosgrove (1984) found unanimous agreement among his survey panel that interpersonal skills are the most important skill competencies for an outdoor leader to possess. Moreover, Buell (1983) states that:

> An outdoor leader should provide a blend of personal and leadership characteristics with experience and training in order to make sound judgments, convey a sense of caring for

participants and accomplish predetermined goals and objectives. A leader should be viewed as a "Renaissance Person," who knows much and has experienced much in a wide variety of fields.

It is evident that numerous individuals, particularly women, are participating in outdoor activities. Moreover, women are not only participating, they are also being employed as outdoor leaders. It is evident too that outdoor adventure programs seek to employ leaders who not only possess a high degree of technical outdoor skills but, who also possess a high level of interpersonal and philosophical understanding skills as well. Since some attempts have been made to define minimum outdoor leadership skill competencies, the purpose of this study was to assess the level of competency possessed by male and female leaders employed in various outdoor adventure programs.

PROCEDURES

In order to measure outdoor leadership competency, a survey was designed in which field staff employed by outdoor adventure programs would rate their skill levels. Based on the work of Cosgrove (1984), 10 skills commonly needed by the staff of many outdoor programs were selected. Five skills were chosen in the technical skill category; backpacking, rock climbing, emergency care, canoeing, and knowledge of minimum impact camping techniques. Three skills were chosen

from the interpersonal skill category; knowledge of creative problem solving, knowledge of evaluation and debriefing, and outdoor teaching skill. Two skills were selected from the philosophical understanding skill category; knowledge of experiential education philosophy and knowledge of leadership responsibilities. Each of the skills was rated on a zero to eight scale, eight being the most skilled. Short descriptive paragraphs were placed at the four and eight point levels to help clarify the amount of skill possessed at that level. The entire questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of professionals representing a diverse background of outdoor teaching, leadership, and administrative experiences in various geographical areas.

Questionnaires were sent to field staff supervisors of 13 outdoor adventure programs representing a variety of geographical regions throughout the United States. Each supervisor was asked to distribute 10 questionnaires to field staff employed by that program. Of the 130 questionnaires mailed, 74 surveys were returned by 10 of the 13 program supervisors, generating a 57% response rate.

RESULTS

Means for the skill levels of female and male staff members are shown in Table 1. All of the mean levels for both female and male staff fall above the mid-point of the zero to eight rating scale. The mean level of female

Table 1

t Test for Differences Between Male and Female Staff

Skill	Sex	n	Mean	SD	t
Technical Skill Category					
Backpacking	F	22	5.91	1.87	2.32*
	M	52	6.85	1.45	
Rock Climbing	F	22	4.36	1.76	3.55**
	M	52	5.94	1.74	
Emergency Care	F	22	6.32	1.32	1.56
	M	52	5.75	1.48	
Canoeing	F	22	5.55	2.24	0.84
	M	52	4.98	2.78	
Minimum Impact Camping	F	22	6.00	1.88	1.48
	M	52	6.67	1.76	
Total of Technical Skills	F	22	5.63	1.28	1.25
	M	52	6.04	1.31	
Interpersonal Skill Category					
Creative Problem Solving	F	22	6.23	2.35	0.63
	M	52	5.88	2.04	
Evaluation and Debriefing	F	22	6.55	2.02	0.11
	M	52	6.60	1.71	

Table 1 (Con't.)

Skill	Sex	n	Mean	SD	t
Outdoor Teaching	F	22	7.00	1.15	0.78
	M	52	6.71	1.55	
Total of Interpersonal Skills	F	22	6.59	1.59	0.49
	M	52	6.40	1.53	
Philosophical Understanding Skill Category					
Knowledge of Experiential Education Philosophy	F	22	5.68	1.59	0.42
	M	52	5.88	2.02	
Knowledge of Leadership Responsibilities	F	22	6.41	1.22	0.15
	M	52	6.46	1.45	
Total of Philosophical Understanding Skills	F	22	6.05	1.25	0.33
	M	52	6.17	1.60	
Ovrerall Skill Level (Sum of 10 Skills)	F	22	6.00	1.13	0.55
	M	52	6.17	1.27	

*p< .05.
**p< .01.

respondents ranged from a low of 4.36 for rock climbing to a high of 7.00 for outdoor teaching. Whereas, the mean level of male respondents ranged from a low of 4.98 for canoeing to a high of 6.85 for backpacking.

A t test for independent samples was used to determine if there existed a significant difference between the mean levels of female and male staff. Male respondents reported a significantly higher level of backpacking skill ($x=6.85$) than did female respondents ($x=5.91$) ($p<.05$). In addition, male respondents reported a significantly higher level of rock climbing skill ($x=5.94$) than female respondents ($x=4.36$) ($p<.01$).

Although not significantly different, the mean skill levels of female staff members were higher than the mean skill levels of male staff for the skill items emergency care, canoeing, creative problem solving, and outdoor teaching. The mean levels of male staff were higher than those of female staff for the skill items backpacking, rock climbing, minimum impact camping, evaluation and debriefing, knowledge of experiential education philosophy, and knowledge of leadership responsibilities. Of the six skill items for which male respondents reported their skill level to be higher than female respondents, only two were significantly different; backpacking and rock climbing.

CONCLUSION

Possibly the most interesting finding of this study is that there existed no significant difference of skill rating between male and female outdoor leaders with regard to 8 of the 10 skills examined. This fact should be most interesting to outdoor program supervisors when hiring staff. The data from this study should help to demonstrate to administrators that, overall, they should be hiring a highly competent leader whether that person is female or male.

Another intrigueing finding was that females rated themselves significantly lower than males regarding their levels of backpacking and rock climbing skill. The reason for significantly lower ratings by females for the two items cannot be explained by the findings of this study. However, research has shown that males generally display a greater amount of physical strength than do females (Rarick, 1973). Moreover, Harris (1978), in her discussion regarding the results of studies which compare the strength of males to females at various age levels, states that, "The greatest differences are observed from puberty throughout the active reproductive years when sex hormones are at their highest levels. During this period, males have higher levels of androgens which promote greater muscle mass, larger and more dense bones, and increased power which give them a decided advantage over females in situations demanding strength.

speed, and power." She goes on to say, "Females have higher levels of estrogens which shorten the growing period and increase fat tissue. More significantly, lower levels of androgens do not promote the same development of muscle mass. The net result is a smaller and less powerful female, as compared to the male, on the average." The findings of Rarick (1973) and Harris (1978) would suggest that the significant difference in ratings by men and women outdoor leaders, for the skills backpacking and rock climbing, may be explained by the general strength differences between females and males.

The findings of this study are interesting, yet more research of this kind is needed to substantiate the results. The current study examined only 10 skills, however future investigations should attempt to expand this number. Moreover, an effort should be made to reach a greater number of outdoor leaders in a wider variety of settings.

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